

Student's Name
Dr. Marchbanks
English 231 Section 2
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Outline: Heart of Darkness

I. Intro

Thesis: Conrad uses the title "heart of darkness" to describe the imperialized colonies rather than the imperialist's heart. Despite the novel's anti-imperialistic tone, Conrad does not condemn individual imperialist, specifically Kurtz, rather he uses Marlow to idolize Kurtz.

II. European exploration laid the foundation for imperialism.

A. Western Expansion

1. Following the renaissance, the quest for exploration was driven by determined men and the new concept of states (Tarling 2001, 24).
2. The Holy Roman Empire was losing power, which led to the rise of states and to the race for individual power and wealth (Tarling 2001, 25).
3. The rivalry admits Europe and the need for new trade routes helped establish the concept of imperialism.
4. "Any country which does not wish to become less important must obtain as much new territory as (their) rivals are doing" (Tarling 2001, 33).

B. British Imperialism

1. The fierce rivalry between Britain and France, the rising power of the United States, and the industrial revolution provoked a global race for land.
2. Eurocentric made their culture greater and thus they had reason to spread their own ideals across the world (Hobson 1902, 305).
3. "The sun never set in Britain."
4. Imperialism and Colonialism took away the rights of the colonies, leaving them completely dependent on Britain.

III. Conrad portrays the negative effects imperialism.

A. Marlow's definition of imperialism

1. "They grabbed what they could get for the sake of what was to be got. It was just robbery with violence, aggravated murder on a great scale, and men going at it blind—as is very proper for those how tackle a darkness" (7).
2. "the conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves..." (7).
3. "She talked about 'weaning those ignorant millions from their horrid ways,' till, upon my word, she made me quite uncomfortable. I ventured to hint that the company was run for profit" (12).

B. How does Marlow see the imperialized nations?

1. "True, by this time it was not a blank space any more. It had got filled since my boyhood with rivers and lakes and names. It has ceased to be a blank space of a delightful mystery—a white patch for a boy to dream gloriously over. It had become a place of darkness" (9).
2. "...that took the forests, the creek, the mud, the river—it seems to be beckon with a dishonoring appeal to the lurking death, to the hidden evils, the profound darkness of its heart" (33).

a. While the barbaric people at first appear to be apart of the heart of darkness, I think Conrad is talking about the death the Europeans brought. Through imperialism, people have lost their identity and are subject to European slavery.

1. “symbolic subjection.” Slaves were blank slates for the owners to imprint their own needs (Presendholt 117)

b. “They were dying slowly—it was very clear. They were not enemies, they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly now, nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation lying confusedly in the greenish gloom... fed on unfamiliar food, they sickened, becoming inefficient, and were then allowed to crawl away and rest” (17).

III. Marlow’s view of Kurtz

A. As Marlow penetrates the “heart of darkness,” he idealistically idolizes Kurtz, painting Kurtz as a light in the midst of a haunting evil.

1. Marlow first seeks to understand Kurtz’s character and person.

a. Marlow asks, “who is this Mr. Kurtz” (25)? “He is a prodigy... He is an emissary of pity, and science, and progress, and the devil knows what else” (25).

b. “As for me, I seemed to see Kurtz for the first time. It was a distinct glimpse: the dugout, four paddling savages, and the line white man turning his back suddenly on headquarters, on relief, on thoughts of home, perhaps, settling his face towards the depths of the wilderness, towards his empty and desolate station. I did not know the motive: (32).

c. “The point was in his being a gifted creature, and that of all his first the one that stood out prominently, that carried with it a sense of real presence, was his ability to talk, his words—the gift of expression, the bewildering, the illuminating, the most exalted, and the most contemptible, the pulsating stream, of life or the deceitful flow from the heart of an impenetrable darkness” (46).

2. Marlow becomes obsessed with Kurtz, making him the point—the idealized point—of his journey.

a. “For me it crawled towards Kurtz—exclusively...” (35).

b. “And we crept on, towards Kurtz” (37).

c. “I couldn’t have been more disgusted if I have traveled all this way for the sole purpose of talking with Kurtz... (I) Became aware that that was exactly what I had been looking forward too—a talk with Kurtz” (46).

B. After meeting Kurtz, seeing his role in imperialism, Marlow still idolizes him and respects Kurtz.

1. Marlow defends Kurtz

a. “...and I mentally turned o Kurtz for relief—positively for relief. ‘Never the less, I think Kurtz is a remarkable man,’ I said with emphasis” (62).

b. Despite the fact that Marlow “can’t bear a lie,” he lies for Kurtz in the end.

c. “Soul. If anybody has every struggled with a soul I am the man. And I wasn’t arguing with a lunatic either...But his soul was mad. Being alone is

the wilderness, it had looked within itself and, by heavens I tell you, it had gone mad” (66).

2. Seeing Kurtz impact on people, the Russian and Marlow himself.
 - a. The Russian tells Marlow, “Oh, he enlarged my mind” (63).
 - b. “This is the reason why I affirm that Kurtz was a remarkable man. He has something to say. He said it” (70).
 - c. “Would they have fallen, I wonder, if I has rendered Kurtz that justice which was his due? Hadn’t he said he wanted only justice? But I couldn’t. I couldn’t tell her. It would have need to dark—too dark altogether...” (77).